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Chairman: Mr. Galuška ..... (Czech Republic)

Contents

Agenda item 109: Advancement of women*

Agenda item 110: Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women*

* Items which the Committee has decided to consider together.

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 109: Advancement of women (A/54/3, A/54/38/Rev.1, A/54/98, A/54/123-E/1999/66, A/54/124, A/54/156-E/1999/102, A/54/156/Add.1-E/1999/102/Add.1, A/54/224, A/54/225, A/54/341, A/54/342, A/54/352 and A/54/405)

Agenda item 110: Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women (A/54/124, A/54/264 and A/54/354)

1. **Ms. King** (Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women), introducing the items, welcomed the recent adoption by the General Assembly of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women on the right to petition, which testified to the commitment of Governments to provide women not only with the legal framework to protect and promote their rights, but also with procedures for translating those rights into reality. While international mechanisms for redress were essential for ensuring the implementation of freely accepted State obligations concerning women's human rights, those mechanisms would always remain subsidiary to national remedies. She believed that the Optional Protocol would inspire Governments to examine currently available domestic remedies for preventing and redressing violations of the rights of women under the Convention. Such action would ultimately create an environment in which women and girls would be able to enjoy all their human rights fully, and their grievances would be addressed with the seriousness and speed they deserved. Universal ratification of the Convention by the year 2000 remained critical; she urged States which had not yet done so to ratify or accede to the Convention as soon as possible.

2. Great efforts had been made by Governments, the United Nations system, non-governmental organizations and other actors of civil society to sustain the momentum generated by the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995. Governments had enacted and revised legislation to bring it into line with the Convention, other international and regional human-rights instruments, and the Beijing Platform for Action. Women's access to justice at the national and international levels had improved. Governments had taken steps to ensure that the realities of women's lives were more explicitly addressed in planning and policy-making, particularly with regard to poverty eradication. Non-governmental organizations had become more sophisticated in their advocacy for women's empowerment and equal participation in decision-making at all levels. The United Nations system was placing gender units and focal points in central policy and decision-making positions to enable them to further gender equality.

3. Attention to gender equality concerns had also continued in intergovernmental processes, particularly through the follow-up to global conferences. The Economic and Social Council had made significant progress in studying the links between social exclusion and women's inequality. The ministerial communiqué adopted at the conclusion of the Council's 1999 high-level segment gave clear recognition that progress in the fight against poverty was conditional upon women's empowerment.

4. The link between the persistence of poverty and women's inequality was particularly apparent in rural areas. The General Assembly had a particular responsibility for promoting more effective measures to break the cycle of poverty for rural women and their families. A draft strategy for action was expected to be adopted following the recent high-level consultation on rural women and information organized by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

5. The publication by the Division for the Advancement of Women of the *1999 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development* and its consideration by the Second Committee presented a special opportunity to integrate gender equality in all Second Committee issues. The *Survey* examined the gender dimensions of economic development in the context of recent labour market trends around the globe, and, together with *The World's Women: Trends and Statistics 2000*, should provide a series of policy options to Governments and decision makers. She urged the General Assembly to base its consideration of management of the global economy on the information available concerning the impact which gender relations had on a country's capacity for economic adjustment and development. Women's empowerment and gender equality were both means and ends in the fight against poverty.

6. In the search for new means of conflict prevention, it had become clear, over the past few years, that the nature of conflicts had changed: inter-State war had given way to intra-State conflict. One of the most harrowing developments was the large number of child soldiers. Furthermore, women were increasingly the target of hostile action by warring factions unconstrained by international humanitarian and human-rights standards. At the same time, there was a need to recognize women's capabilities and strengths, their role in the community, and their potential for contribution to peacebuilding, conflict resolution and reconstruction of torn societies. Communities needed to be monitored for early signs of tension and social exclusion so that preventive and

remedial measures could be taken. Violations of the rights of women and girls and harmful practices, including trafficking in women and children, needed to be considered for their larger social implications.

7. Limited progress continued to be made on the issue of the status of women in the Secretariat. Although the increase in women's overall representation over the past year had been small, there had been notable progress in the representation of women at the D-1 level. The Secretary-General had issued revised terms of reference of the Steering Committee for the Improvement of the Status of Women in the Secretariat, which had already started its work. Its functions included monitoring the development and implementation of action plans to achieve gender balance. Also of interest was the latest revision of the Special Measures for the Achievement of Gender Equality (ST/AI/1999/9). The appointment of a principal adviser in her office was a welcome development. The Economic and Social Council's agreed conclusions on gender mainstreaming, and on operational activities, together with the guidance provided by the Secretary-General for their implementation, had been decisive factors in the progress made in gender mainstreaming both in the Secretariat and system-wide.

8. With regard to the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), the activities described in the biennial report of the Director (A/54/352) represented genuine effort on the part of a very small, dedicated staff to work towards fulfilling the mandate of the Institute. An even more pressing issue was the follow-up to Economic and Social Council resolution 1999/54, concerning the revitalization of the Institute. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for INSTRAW had had a first meeting of donors and other interested parties, including representatives of regional groups and the host country, to get feedback on the preliminary approach proposed by the Secretary-General and developed in collaboration with the Director and members of the Board. The approach focused on creating an Internet-based capacity and involved the establishment of a new system, called the "gender awareness information network system". It was hoped that the General Assembly would make decisions that would enable the Secretary-General, the Board and the Director to start energetically on the new programme. That action would depend almost entirely on the political will of Member States and on the pledges earmarked for INSTRAW at the pledging conference in November. The future of INSTRAW, as one of the three pillars of the work of the United Nations concentrating exclusively on gender issues, was at stake.

9. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, in its report to the preparatory committee for the special session, had identified a series of challenges for implementation of the Platform for Action, many of which were confirmed in the assessments provided by Governments in their replies to the questionnaire on the review and appraisal process. One such challenge, which required concerted efforts, was the persistence of stereotypical attitudes towards the gender roles of women and men, which created a pervasive climate of discrimination and impeded many of the achievements made in other areas of work.

10. **Ms. Heyzer** (Executive Director, United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)) said that General Assembly resolutions on women's empowerment and gender equality had strengthened the capacity of UNIFEM to make a difference in women's lives at the country level.

11. As a result of the establishment of a Trust Fund in Support of Action to Eliminate Violence against Women, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 50/166, more than $3 million had been invested in 71 projects in over 40 countries. The initial investment of Governments had enabled UNIFEM to attract nearly $1.5 million from private sources. More than 2,000 individuals and groups from around the world had been participating, for a year, in cyber-learning and partnerships using the Internet to focus on ending gender violence and share strategies, research and legislation.

12. Inter-agency decision-making on Trust Fund projects had stimulated stronger partnerships at the country and regional level, which had led to inter-agency campaigns against gender violence in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean. The results included the signing of the Quito declaration committing law enforcement personnel and the judiciary to uphold the international standards of the Convention and the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women, support for women-friendly police stations in Brazil, and measures to ban female genital mutilation in Senegal and to publicize [illegible] violence, especially honour killings, in Jordan. Other United Nations bodies were becoming involved; for example, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) was investing in women's programmes in various regions.

13. General Assembly resolution 52/94 endorsed the role of UNIFEM in strengthening women's economic capacity and encouraging them to become key economic players in combating the feminization of poverty. That had enabled UNIFEM to take up the issue of economic globalization by

addressing the new challenges and ensuring that women benefited from the new opportunities. Both short-term and longer-term results had been generated that benefited women, their families and their communities. Examples were a women's budget initiative in South Africa, new structures to incorporate a gender perspective into trade agreements in Latin America and the Pacific, technical assistance to women butter producers in Burkina Faso, and support for the movement of women of Zimbabwe into non-traditional and higher-paying occupations.

14. The Committee had encouraged UNIFEM to strengthen its work through the resident coordinator system. That had stimulated collaboration at many levels, which had led to an increase in resources and technical support for country-level activities. They included the placement and support of a rapidly increasing number of gender advisers and gender specialists at the country level, and work through the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) sub-group on gender to identify key areas of intervention.

15. UNIFEM had provided support to the planning and implementation of strategies to develop and operationalize national gender action plans that supported the objectives of the Platform for Action, and had also helped to strengthen the capacity to monitor progress. There were many encouraging signs. It had, for example, signed a memorandum of understanding with Mongolia, the first of its type, to support Government efforts to implement its national plan in support of the Beijing Platform for Action. The challenge was to strengthen implementation and accountability. UNIFEM would do all it could to turn resolutions into realities so that, in partnership with Governments and civil societies, it could continue to make a difference in women's lives at the country level.

16. **Ms. González** (Chairperson of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women) welcomed the adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention. She urged all States parties to the Convention to ratify or accede to the Optional Protocol so that it could enter into force as soon as possible.

17. During the twenty-first session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, there had been a solemn commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention, followed by a round table on the impact of the Convention at the domestic level. The twentieth anniversary had also been commemorated by a round table held during the fifty-fifth session of the Commission on Human Rights. Those events had demonstrated that while much progress had been made, particularly with regard to women's equal franchise and participation in public life, much more remained to be done, especially in relation to persisting stereotypical attitudes towards the gender roles of women and men. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women had noted, through its review of the reports of States parties, that such attitudes perpetuated traditional practices and customs prejudicial to women such as violence against women, forced marriage, preference for sons, and honour killings, and created a pervasive climate of discrimination.

18. Recalling the objective of universal ratification of the Convention by the year 2000, she called upon the remaining States which had not yet done so to ratify or accede to the Convention as soon as possible, before the special session of the General Assembly in the year 2000.

19. It was encouraging that, although the Convention continued to be subject to a large number of reservations, some of them far-reaching, there had been a response by States parties to the General Assembly's appeal to limit the extent of any reservations they lodged to the Convention, and to review their reservations regularly with a view to withdrawing them. On that basis, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women consulted States parties on any reservations to the Convention during the analysis of their reports, and those efforts had led several States parties to withdraw or at least modify their reservations.

20. As of 1 October 1999, only 22 States parties had accepted the amendment to article 20, paragraph 1, of the Convention, which limited the meeting time of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women to two weeks annually. She urged all States parties to accept the amendment so that the two-thirds majority required to bring it into effect could be achieved. Following authorization by the General Assembly, the Committee had held two annual sessions since January 1997, which had allowed it to make progress in its work and significantly reduce the number of reports awaiting review. It had reviewed the reports of 48 States parties and formulated concluding comments on them, and had adopted general recommendations on women in public life, and on women and health, in 1997 and 1999 respectively. It had also focused on a number of issues highlighted in its report to the Commission of the Status of Women acting as the preparatory committee for the special session of the General Assembly.

21. In 1999, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women had decided to modify its working methods. In particular, it had convened its pre-session working group at the end of the session prior to that

at which reports would be considered, so as to give States parties ample time to prepare full written responses to the lists of issues and questions. The Committee had continued to develop its relationship with specialized agencies, funds and programmes of the United Nations system in accordance with article 22 of the Convention, and with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and human-rights mechanisms, including treaty bodies and rapporteurs. A workshop on gender integration into the human-rights system convened by the Office, the Division for the Advancement of Women and UNIFEM in May 1999 had laid the groundwork for closer cooperation between human-rights treaty bodies and other human-rights mechanisms.

22. Overdue reports were a major concern. As of 1 October 1999, 54 initial reports, 57 second periodic reports, and many other third, fourth and fifth periodic reports had not been submitted. She urged States parties which had not yet done so to submit their initial and periodic reports as soon as possible. In implementation of General Assembly resolution 53/118, a subregional training workshop for States parties had been organized by the Division for the Advancement of Women at Cotonou, Benin, in July 1999, in order to provide technical assistance and guidance on preparing reports, particularly initial reports.

23. **Mr. Hernandez** (Joint Inspection Unit), introducing the report of the Joint Inspection Unit on its evaluation of INSTRAW (A/54/156-E/1999/102 and A/54/156/Add.1-E/1999/102/Add.1), said that the Unit had ascertained that INSTRAW had achieved remarkable success and provided an example to the entire United Nations system of what could be accomplished with the scantest of resources. Closing the Institute as a result of the acute financial crisis it currently faced would reflect very poorly on the commitment of the United Nations to the advancement of women. The survival of the Institute must be secured; the recommendations in the report supported the Institute's continuation.

24. The report recommended that action should be taken to raise the visibility of INSTRAW, to strengthen its fund-raising function, and to urge the Board of Trustees of the Institute to take a more active role in fund-raising at the regional level. He noted with pleasure that an experienced professional had already been appointed Acting Director of the Institute, as had been suggested in recommendation 3 (a) of the report.

25. Like many other institutions in the United Nations system, INSTRAW was required to raise all of its funding from voluntary contributions, and suffered a disadvantage in the competition for funds that had characterized United Nations programming for many years. He called on the United Nations Secretariat to compensate INSTRAW for the inappropriate use of its funds in respect of administrative services, and expressed the hope that Member States would rectify the current unfair situation in which some United Nations research institutes were able to supplement their voluntary funds with subventions from the regular budget while others, including INSTRAW, were denied such an option. Finally, he noted that the Institute's Strategic Plan and Work Programme for 2000-2003 represented a serious attempt to move INSTRAW forward to the next millennium by proposing institutional reforms designed to provide it with a more sustainable financial base.

26. **Mr. Cherif** (Tunisia) said that his delegation regretted the failure of contributions to INSTRAW to reach the levels originally projected, which had impaired the Institute's ability to implement the approved programme of activities for the biennium 1998-1999. He hoped that the upcoming meeting of donors would improve the Institute's financial situation, and supported the Chairman's proposal to keep the agenda item open for further discussion.

27. **Ms. Wremer** (Norway) said that her delegation fully agreed with the Special Adviser's observation that stereotypical attitudes towards the gender roles of women and men created a pervasive climate of discrimination, and asked for her views on how men could and should participate in the elimination of discrimination based on gender.

28. **Ms. de Armas Garcia** (Cuba) said that her delegation wholeheartedly supported the work of INSTRAW, and agreed with Mr. Hernandez on the need for funds from the regular budget to be made available so as to enable the Institute to carry out its mandate.

29. **Ms. Elliott** (Guyana), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, asked when the relevant report of the Secretary-General under item 109 would be available, and stressed its potential usefulness to the upcoming meeting of donors to INSTRAW.

30. **Ms. King** (Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women) replied that a paper containing estimates of the Institute's current financial situation would be made available prior to the meeting of donors on 18 October 1999. That paper would serve as the framework for the report of the Secretary-General to be distributed following its translation on a priority basis.

31. She also agreed on the need for men to be involved in all aspects of achieving the goal of gender equality, and for them to understand that women's advancement was not a

threat to men, but rather that its achievement would result in the betterment of society as a whole.

32. **Ms. Rasi** (Finland), speaking on behalf of the European Union, the Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union (Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia), the associated country Cyprus and, in addition, Iceland, said that the European Community and the States members of the European Union were fully committed to the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in their national, regional and international policies, including development cooperation. They had prioritized the mainstreaming of a gender perspective in order to translate the objectives of gender equality and non-discrimination into reality in the field of development cooperation, while simultaneously emphasizing positive action for women. The European Union had also paid special attention to such issues as violence against women and women in decision-making, and it recognized the importance of constant dialogue with non-governmental organizations and their role in promoting gender equality in development cooperation.

33. In the light of the need to identify actions to further implement the Beijing commitments, the European Union called on the Secretariat to prepare a forward-looking analytical summary of the national implementation reports submitted by Governments. It would welcome a dialogue on strategies to overcome obstacles to implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action during preparations for the special session, and the latter should endorse a number of those strategies and identify further implementation initiatives. It also welcomed the proposal to allocate time during the current session to bring the process forward.

34. The European Union attached great importance to a close and coordinated follow-up of the recommendations contained in the final document of the 1999 General Assembly special session on Population and Development for strengthening efforts in the areas of maternal mortality and gender equality. Governments, supported by the international community and the United Nations system, bore primary responsibility for creating an enabling environment for development and gender equality, but only coherent and coordinated joint action would enable the United Nations system to assist Governments effectively in that task.

35. The European Union strongly encouraged all States that had not yet done so to ratify or accede to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women by the year 2000, and was gravely concerned that many States had made reservations incompatible with the purpose of the Convention. Such reservations should be withdrawn as a matter of priority, while any other reservations should be formulated as precisely as possible and in such a way as to ensure that none were contrary to international treaty law. The European Union welcomed the recent adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention, and called on all States to give serious consideration to ratifying it as soon as possible.

36. The European Union was working to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls. It acknowledged the efforts by the Secretariat and UNIFEM in that respect, and welcomed the Secretary-General's report on violence against women migrant workers (A/54/342), whose protection merited special attention. In addition to combating violence against women, the European Union was continuing to implement measures to combat violence against children and young people, and supported the development of international standards in the fight against the traffic in human beings, the majority of whose victims were women and children. The European Union called for immediate measures to help the victims as well as to address root causes and contributing factors. In that regard, it also welcomed the work of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Elaboration of a Convention against Transnational Organized Crime.

37. It was pleased to note that many countries had taken legal measures to eliminate cultural, religious or traditional practices, including female genital mutilation, that violated the human rights of women and girls. Although in keeping with the duty of States to protect all human rights, such actions were insufficient by themselves to end those practices and should be supplemented with education and public awareness campaigns.

38. The European Union welcomed the outcome of the 1999 high-level segment of the Economic and Social Council on the theme of linking employment, work, poverty eradication and the advancement of women. As the majority of people living in poverty were women and children, a gender perspective had to be integrated into poverty-eradication strategies. Women's equal access to control over economic resources and opportunities and their participation in political decision-making, as well as in employment, education and training, health care and other basic social services, must be ensured. Investment in processes that brought about gender equality and ensured equal access to a full enjoyment of rights were essential in the fight against poverty. Furthermore, efforts to reconcile work and family life were needed not only to increase women's participation in the labour market but also to provide a better quality of life for all. In short, the empowerment of women was not

only central to their advancement, but benefited both women and men and the society at large.

39. **Ms. Elliott** (Guyana), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that, in the context of the clear guidance provided by the strategic objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action, the Ministers of that group had addressed the issue of employment and poverty eradication for the empowerment and advancement of women at the 1999 substantive session of the Economic and Social Council. At that session, the Ministers had underscored the importance of mainstreaming a gender perspective in all policies aimed at eradicating poverty and generating employment, emphasized the importance of women's equal access to productive resources and their participation in the planning and implementation of poverty-eradication strategies, and pointed to the need to deal with the continued marginalization of and discrimination against women in the economy.

40. The Group of 77 and China reaffirmed the importance of the goals established at the Beijing Conference, and hoped that the recent deliberations of the Economic and Social Council and of the Commission on the Status of Women would serve as building blocks in preparing for the special session. The Group reiterated its firm support for the Commission's efforts to monitor the situation of women and promote their rights worldwide.

41. Despite some progress, much remained to be done to achieve the goals of the Beijing Conference in the area of health issues affecting women and of institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women. Violence against women persisted; likewise, growing substance abuse among women, the health risks of female genital mutilation, poor health care and the fact that women were twice as likely as men to be infected by HIV/AIDS remained causes for deep concern. The Commission had stressed the importance of education as an impetus for change and of a comprehensive legal framework to address the special needs of female migrant workers and women and children as victims of sexual exploitation and in conflict situations.

42. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women would continue to play an important role in monitoring implementation of both the Convention and the Optional Protocol. Moreover, the work of the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women and of UNIFEM was commendable, and the Group looked forward to working closely with them.

43. The revitalization of INSTRAW was most welcome. Member States must, however, provide the funds to enable it to overcome its financial difficulties and serve as the primary focal point for research on gender issues. It was thus all the more regrettable that certain reports necessary to discussion of that item had yet to be issued.

44. As demonstrated by the financial crisis in Asia, women were the first to be affected by economic change. The impact of structural adjustment and other economic policies on the lives of women and children was all too often, however, overlooked. Unfavourable terms of trade, inadequate markets for domestic goods and high debt-servicing costs substantially reduced the ability of developing countries to invest in social services vital to women — especially rural women, who bore the brunt of resource shortfalls. Sustained national growth and an enabling international environment were vital. If entrenched attitudes, discriminatory practices and socio-economic obstacles were to be overcome, political will and partnerships between Governments and civil society were essential. Only then might commitments made at Beijing be implemented and the goals of equality, development and peace advanced for women everywhere.

45. **Ms. Bhuiyan** (Bangladesh) said that Bangladesh applauded the recent adoption of the Optional Protocol, which would, in its view, go a long way towards securing women's rights. Her Government's satisfaction was not, however, unqualified. The world community had often demonstrated resolve and political will in making forward-looking commitments, and although some women had benefited, discrimination, denial of rights and marginalization were still the rule. Commitments abounded; what was necessary was compliance through action.

46. Bangladesh commended the Secretary-General for highlighting the plight of women in rural areas, women migrant workers and girls affected by traditional and customary practices, and agreed that the effects of globalization and liberalization, along with declining international cooperation, had resulted in the increased marginalization of rural women throughout the developing world. Since such women lacked information, productive resources and access to credit, they could not respond to the commercialization of agriculture and accompanying changes in economic and social structures. Those global trends had therefore exacerbated poverty in many developing countries. Efforts should be made to invest in the human development of rural women through education, health and nutrition programmes and the provision of safe drinking water; to further the empowerment of rural women by enhancing their participation in rural institutions and all levels of decision-making; to incorporate into national development and poverty-alleviation strategies a gender perspective and a focus on job creation for women in rural areas; to increase the provision of microcredit to rural women and the

development of new microcredit institutions; and to strengthen international cooperation to offset the negative impact of globalization, in particular with reference to rural women.

47. The Secretary-General's report on violence against women migrant workers (A/54/342) had concluded that, although the numbers of women migrant workers had increased in recent years, their plight often went unnoticed. In the view of Bangladesh, the dissemination of information both to sending and to receiving States would help to bring such women out of their subhuman condition. Gender-sensitive legislation was needed in order to address both legal and illegal migration.

48. The special session to review the outcome of the Beijing Conference would provide the opportunity for the world community to undertake actions to ensure peace, equality and development for women. The objective was nothing less than the full implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. National action plans were central, as was the participation of civil society. But international support and cooperation were critical: resources must be increased, and used in innovative ways. Bangladesh expected to undertake a comprehensive review of its Beijing commitments at the preparatory committee for the special session, with a view to recommending further implementation measures.

49. **Ms. Wremer** (Norway) said that, although the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was an essential human-rights instrument, only 163 States had ratified or acceded to it; it appeared that universal ratification would not be achieved by 2000. Also regrettable was the large number of reservations entered against that instrument, including some which were incompatible with its purpose. The Convention was nevertheless crucial to empowerment for all women, and had furthered the goal of gender equality throughout the world.

50. Norway warmly welcomed the adoption of the Optional Protocol, which would, in its view, strengthen the international human-rights machinery to take into account the special concerns of women. It intended to be among the first countries to sign the Protocol, and it called on all other States to follow suit. Her delegation also urged Member States to ensure adequate financing and staff support for the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, in view of the additional responsibilities that would fall to it.

51. In March 1999, Norway had celebrated the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Norwegian Gender Equality Act, which had significantly influenced Norwegian society by introducing the principle that gender equality should be mainstreamed. That Act, which stated that the public authorities should promote gender equality in all sectors of society, was currently undergoing a comprehensive revision. The proposed revision would extend the responsibility for gender equality to all employers and to all employees' and employers' organizations. Stricter legislation would be needed to meet the challenges ahead. The Act had increased women's membership of public boards and committees from 20 to 40 per cent in under twenty years; its terms would soon, it was hoped, also apply to the boards of private and semi-private enterprises.

52. In the view of Norway, the special session should reaffirm but not renegotiate the Beijing Platform for Action. Implementation must be given high priority; that session should therefore assess the extent to which Governments, and the United Nations system, had succeeded in incorporating a gender perspective into policies and programmes. The session would also offer the opportunity to address new issues, as well as those that had changed dramatically in the previous five years, such as the situation of women affected by armed conflict. In modern-day conflicts, the line between the battle front and the home front, and the soldier and the civilian, was vanishing: most victims were now civilians, and largely women. More attention must be paid to the role of women in conflict prevention, in peacekeeping operations and in reconstruction and reconciliation. More knowledge was necessary. The Norwegian Government had therefore commissioned a study on the interrelationship between women and armed conflicts, and was looking forward to working with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations as well as with other interested delegations.

53. Although equal rights and opportunities for women had not yet been achieved, Norway was optimistic: the persistent efforts of individuals and non-governmental organizations were ensuring that women's issues remained high on the agenda. The new millennium required empowered women who saw themselves as leaders.

54. **Ms. Tarr-Whelan** (United States of America) said that, in reaffirming its commitment to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the world community must emphasize the implementation of a holistic, human-rights based approach to gender equality which recognized that the whole society benefited from women's equality. The five-year review should focus on the essential link between human rights, economic well-being, and the advancement of women and girls. The United Nations had made great strides in implementing that document, including, in

particular, the adoption by the Commission on the Status of Women of the twelve critical areas of concern. The Economic and Social Council had adopted a policy to mainstream gender into all United Nations policies and programmes, addressed the role of operational activities in promoting the participation of women in development, and adopted a ministerial communiqué on employment, poverty alleviation, and the empowerment and advancement of women.

55. Preparations for the special session should take into account the work thus far accomplished to implement the objectives of the Beijing Conference. In the view of the United States, the five-year review should celebrate and reaffirm the goals of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action while striving for full implementation of that document, with emphasis on the twelve critical areas of concern. The five-year review should be seen as a milestone for the world community. It should emphasize achievements made thus far; adopt a short visionary declaration reaffirming worldwide commitment to the Platform for Action; identify further actions and initiatives needed to accelerate the implementation of that document; and strive to share lessons learned among all delegations. Governments should send high-level delegations, reflecting the importance of the occasion; representatives of youth and non-governmental organizations should also be included in official delegations. All delegations should make public their Government's commitments or actions to further implement the Platform for Action.

56. Lastly, the five-year review should elicit the views of non-governmental organizations and women throughout the world: accredited non-governmental organizations should be invited to participate, reaffirming their importance and that of civil society in implementing the Platform for Action. In addition, international satellite conferencing would enhance the link with government officials and non-governmental organizations worldwide. Her Government suggested that the following topics might be addressed at the special session: women's leadership and political participation, women's economic empowerment; the role of women in peace-building and conflict resolution; trafficking in women and girls; older women; and HIV/AIDS. The United States also wished to reiterate its interest in undertaking a closer study of the ways in which political will, capacity building, accountability, cooperation and partnership could lead to further implementation of the Platform for Action.

57. Under the leadership of President Clinton's Interagency Council on Women, chaired by Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, with First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton as honorary co-chair, the Government was conducting a five-year review of its achievements in implementing the Platform for Action. The results would be published in the year 2000 edition of *America's Commitment*. Previous editions, and the Government's response to the United Nations questionnaire, could be found on its Web site. The United States urged all Governments to publish their replies to the questionnaire on the Internet.

58. The Interagency Council on Women was also working with non-governmental organizations, colleges, universities and regional community organizations to convene related outreach events throughout the country, and events had thus far been planned in ten states. Reports generated at those events would be reviewed and used by the United States delegation to the special session. Her Government looked forward to working with other Governments on behalf of equality for women and girls in the century to come.

59. **Ms. Nishitateno** (Japan) said that her Government welcomed the adoption of the Optional Protocol, a milestone in the struggle for women's rights. Despite the strong momentum created by the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, many obstacles remained. Japan, having ratified the Convention in 1985, had enacted and revised several laws in accordance with that instrument. The revised employment law, for example, obliged companies to establish sexual-harassment-prevention measures and to provide women with easier access to arbitration mechanisms in such areas as job assignment and promotion. A new, basic law aimed to promote a gender-equal society, in which men and women would share equally in benefits and responsibilities.

60. Laws could not, however, change attitudes; to eliminate de facto discrimination, Governments must disseminate information, raise social awareness and mobilize public opinion. Japan had held a number of meetings in 1999, such as the National Conference on the Creation of a Gender-Equal Society, attended by both government officials and the general public. At the regional level, senior government officials of East and South-East Asian Countries had held their fourth meeting in Tokyo to exchange views on promoting the status of women.

61. The Government had recently begun to address the matter of violence against women, including domestic violence and sex crimes, and had established the Committee on Violence against Women, whose task was to conduct hearings and to compile its findings. Non-governmental organizations, which were likewise actively engaged in that issue, had set up shelters for victims of violence throughout Japan. For progress to be achieved, however, men's role

must be considered as well. Also worthy of note was a video conference prepared by UNIFEM entitled "A World Free of Violence against Women", an innovative approach in which Japan, as one of the Fund's main donors, had been proud to participate.

62. Japan firmly believed that the empowerment of women should be further emphasized in development assistance, and had been working closely on that topic with UNDP and the Japan Women in Development Fund, which was currently supporting 15 projects, including one in Cambodia on micro-finance in rural areas.

63. The special session of the General Assembly should provide a great opportunity for the world community to reaffirm its strong hopes for a gender-equal society. In 1998, the Government had established the National Committee of Japan for Women 2000 to facilitate the exchange of information and cooperation with civil society. As a member of the bureau of the Asian group of the preparatory committee, Japan had endeavoured, together with India, to represent the views of Asia in the preparatory process. Her Government pledged to do its utmost to ensure equality and dignity for women and men alike in the coming millennium.

64. **Mr. Ka** (Senegal) said that Senegal intended to be one of the first 10 Member States to ratify the Optional Protocol. The Senegalese Government attached great importance to follow-up to the Beijing Conference and was actively mainstreaming a gender perspective in all sectors of society. It was assisted to that end by the mass media, the education system and a flourishing women's movement. Institutional and other mechanisms for promoting the advancement of women and the rights of girl children had now been established. Senegal could also report progress in enhancing women's participation in government. Violence against women was also being tackled on a priority basis.

65. The Government was mindful of the crucial role played by rural women, yet such women were particularly affected by population growth, desertification, soil degradation and lack of access to land. Their access — on a par with men — to land, credit facilities, technology, education, health services and remunerated employment must be facilitated. In that connection, the initiatives in support of rural women put forward at the Summit of First Ladies for Peace and Humanitarian Issues, held in Abuja, Nigeria, were most welcome, as were the recommendations of the Secretary-General in document A/52/123-E/1999/66.

66. Senegal's national plan of action sought, *inter alia*, to promote the economic advancement of women, to raise the education level and health of women and girls, to increase their participation in economic and political life and to strengthen mechanisms for financing women's activities.

67. New legislation penalized all violence against women, and efforts were under way to bring the law fully into line with the Convention.

68. Government initiatives in the field of women's rights included promoting women's access to all professions. In decision-making, the numbers of Senegalese women in senior posts had been significantly increased, with women now occupying over 15 per cent of government posts. Women also held senior positions in the judiciary. Civil society was currently helping to elaborate an extensive programme to promote awareness of women's rights; training in that area was also being provided for policy-makers, legislators and law-enforcers.

69. The political will existed to implement the results of the Beijing Conference, but much remained to be done, in particular with regard to the mobilization of resources for ambitious national programmes and better coordination of international efforts. In that connection, the preparatory committee for the special session would need to address a number of issues, including foreign debt, the decline in official development assistance, factors impeding access to foreign markets and weak financial flows to countries in economic and political transition.

70. **Ms. Nicodemos** (Brazil) commended the United Nations on providing leadership on gender issues for over fifty years. The newly adopted Optional Protocol would benefit millions of women whose rights continued to be violated. While continuing to adhere to the goals and strategies of the Beijing Platform for Action, Brazil was concerned that new challenges posed by more recent national and international developments should not be overlooked.

71. Various United Nations organs had played a crucial role in promoting the political, social and economic integration of women, in raising awareness of women's rights and in mainstreaming a gender perspective in all areas. UNIFEM had proved to be a particularly valuable partner. Brazil also attached great importance to the activities of INSTRAW.

72. In Brazil, open dialogue between civil society and the Government had provided a new impetus for human-rights activities. Society now understood the importance of promoting equal opportunities. All forms of discrimination were prohibited under the Constitution; de facto implementation of the law was also being promoted by the Government, with the cooperation of civil society. Of particular note was a national campaign for addressing

domestic and sexual violence. Similar initiatives were being implemented at the local level.

73. Although Brazilian women were entering the labour market in increasing numbers, obstacles to their full participation remained. A joint task force comprising government and trade-union representatives was currently addressing gender discrimination in the workplace. In the area of health, her delegation was pleased to report that infant and maternal mortality had been reduced as a direct result of national follow-up to major world conferences; Brazilian women now enjoyed a life expectancy of 74 years. The girl child had been made a national priority; of particular note was a comprehensive national adolescent health-care programme. In education, it was encouraging, too, that females now accounted for half of national school enrolments.

74. Despite progress, the quest for gender equality was far from over. It was encouraging, however, that women's organizations were collaborating with the Government to that end. The international community, for its part, must continue to press for the removal of all obstacles impeding the advancement of women. It was high time to build truly democratic societies which guaranteed the equal rights and responsibilities of all people.

75. **Ms. de Armas García** (Cuba) said that the situation of women at the threshold of the new millennium continued to be complex, and was particularly tragic in the developing countries, where war, poverty, disease and other fundamental obstacles to the advancement of women were exacerbated by foreign debt, structural-adjustment programmes and the effects of globalization.

76. Women made up 70 per cent of the world's 2 billion poor. While their economic participation had increased by only 4 per cent in twenty years, unemployment was 10 to 40 per cent greater among women than among men. Although women held the most precarious jobs, and carried a greater share of the workload, they earned less than men. The number of peasant women living in poverty had increased by 50 per cent in twenty years. Of the almost one billion illiterate adults in the world, two thirds were women. Women had a lower access to health services than men, and their health was deteriorating from poor nutrition. The economic crisis was undermining the quality of women's everyday lives, and violence against women had risen to alarming levels.

77. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action continued to be essential for the advancement of women throughout the world, and the challenges ahead were crucial. The fulfilment of its objectives would require access to resources at the national and international levels. Although the cold war had ended, huge sums were still devoted to the arms race; they should instead be allotted to progress, welfare and development. A new climate of international cooperation was required in order to mobilize resources for education, training and other activities to advance the status of women; such resources should be charged to the United Nations regular budget. Cuba continued to work towards achieving the eradication of all violence against women everywhere, and hoped that universal ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women would soon be attained.

78. In Cuba, the Declaration and Platform for Action had been widely publicized and discussed ever since its adoption; and in 1997, the Government had formulated a national action plan. Cuban women had organized many events within the framework of the Government's national apparatus for the advancement of women and the implementation of the Convention, in association with the Federation of Cuban Women. It had responded to the United Nations questionnaire, and was committed to the review process. Indeed, through more than 40 years of social transformation, Cuba had proved that, if the political will existed, the situation of women could be radically transformed.

79. In Cuba, women made up over 40 per cent of the labour force, 66 per cent of technicians and higher-education professionals, 30 per cent of senior officials, 27 per cent of deputies to Parliament; 60 per cent of university students and 40 per cent of scientific researchers. In the previous year, virtually all Cuban women had given birth in medical facilities, and the maternal mortality rate was 2.2 per 10,000 deliveries. Infant mortality had fallen to 7.1 per 1,000 live births. Life expectancy for Cuban women surpassed 76 years. The Government was not satisfied, however, and would continue to work towards a greater presence of Cuban women in leadership posts.

80. All those achievements had come about despite the illegal blockade imposed by the United States on Cuba, a blockade which had recently been bolstered by extraterritorial laws that violated the sovereignty of States and contravened international law and the Charter of the United Nations. The blockade caused a shortage of essential medical supplies and foods, severely affecting the lives of Cuban women. The Government had invited the Special Rapporteur on violence against women to visit Cuba in June 1999 to observe the effects of the blockade.

81. **Mr. Larrain** (Chile) said that his Government attached great importance to the Convention on the Elimination of All

Forms of Discrimination against Women, and applauded the adoption of the Optional Protocol, which constituted a significant advance in the protection of women's rights. The road was long, and many challenges lay ahead. Regrettably, situations prejudicial to women continued to arise. Events like those which occurred daily in countries like Afghanistan recalled that the work ahead would not be easy and much remained to be accomplished.

82. Chile had chaired the Regional Conference on the Integration of Women into Latin American Economic and Social Development, and had supported the initiatives contained in the Santiago Consensus. The Bureau was currently preparing for the eighth session, to be held at Lima in February 2000. Its mission was the development of regional proposals for the special session of the General Assembly. With regard to other aspects of the regional plan, his delegation associated itself with the statements made by the delegation of Mexico, speaking on behalf of the Rio Group.

83. On the bilateral front, the Governments of Chile and Argentina had recently agreed to establish cooperation between their respective departments for women's affairs. The Chilean Government in 1991 had established a public entity to promote equal rights and opportunities for women in national development. That body had formulated an equal-opportunities plan, which had become the main tool for implementing the Beijing Platform for Action. The Government had identified education, labour participation, poverty and family as central areas of concern; considerable progress had been made in those areas during the past decade, including the increased participation of women in the work force; a diminution of the still large gap between income earned by male and female heads of households; the virtual disappearance of the gender gap in the provision of formal education (although considerable social and economic differences remained); a diminution of the maternal mortality rate from 0.4 to 0.2 per thousand live births, largely attributable to the universal availability of medical attention at the time of birth; and an increase in the numbers of women in intermediate decision-making posts.

84. In the legal domain, a significant achievement had been the amendment of article 1 of the Constitution, replacing "all men" by "all persons", and of article 19, explicitly stating that men and women were equal before the law. Significant advances had also been made in ensuring the equality of legal rights in the areas of family and labour, including the adoption of the law on family violence, the law recognizing the legal equality of daughters and sons born both in and out of wedlock, and the law governing participation in family earnings and assets, all of which sought to eliminate discrimination and to protect individuals, especially women and children, within the family. Newly enacted laws improved the access of women to employment, enhanced working conditions, prohibited employers from refusing work to pregnant women, and granted special leave to workers whose children were seriously ill.

85. The gender theme held an increasingly important place on the governmental agenda, and significant legal advances had been achieved; at the same time, public opinion had shown a heightened awareness of the situation of women and the need for the Government to incorporate the notion of gender equity in its programmes and policies. The challenge ahead was to continue legal reforms, reinforce changes and promote cultural transformations capable of furthering that process.

86. **Ms. Paterson** (New Zealand) welcomed the adoption of the Optional Protocol, which represented a milestone for the international community. Much, however, remained to be done to implement the Beijing agenda. There was a continuing credibility gap between international legal standards and their de facto implementation. The abuses of women's human rights — in both war and peace — continued unabated, and appeared even to be on the increase. New Zealand urged States which had not yet done so to ratify the Convention.

87. The realization of human rights must be a cornerstone of development. At the regional level, the Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions provided a platform for cooperation on human-rights implementation. New Zealand promoted regional cooperation and capacity-building for women's rights in partnership with non-governmental organizations in the field. The reduction of domestic violence had been made a particular priority. United Nations agencies such as UNIFEM, UNFPA and UNDP had also impacted significantly on the lives of women in the region. New Zealand supported their continuing efforts.

88. The special session should be used to assess Member States' progress towards the goals set at Beijing and to formulate strategies to effect a quantum improvement in women's rights. To that end, the cooperation of civil society was indispensable.

89. Over the past two years, the New Zealand Government had conducted the first comprehensive survey of how New Zealanders used their time. The survey would provide valuable information on the contribution to society and to the economy of women's unpaid work. Such information could be used to improve public-sector policy and programme development in the health, employment and

welfare sectors and for policy advice on population groups such as women, Maori and young people.

90. New Zealand remained concerned at the slow implementation of the plan for the advancement of women in the Secretariat. Despite improved representation of women at a number of levels, the goal of 50/50 gender distribution by the year 2000 would not be met. The Secretary-General and all components of the United Nations system should make urgent efforts to attain that goal.

91. New Zealand supported all efforts by the Secretary-General and United Nations bodies to implement the 1997 agreed conclusions for furthering the strategic objectives identified at Beijing. The efforts of the Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality of the Administrative Committee on Coordination were most welcome, as was the work of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women.

92. Strong institutions were also needed at the regional level. In 1999 New Zealand had chaired the forum for Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), which had elaborated a framework to ensure that women participated fully in the region's economic prosperity. New Zealand had also hosted a meeting of the APEC-related Women Leaders Network, which had brought together women in business, the rural sector, science and technology, the public sector and non-governmental organizations. Also in 1999, a first-ever meeting of indigenous women exporters had been held in association with the Network, enabling their perspectives to be fed into APEC ministerial meetings.

93. At the special session, the international community must focus on improving the quality of women's lives in all countries through the realization of their rights. New Zealand looked forward to working to that end with partners at all levels.

94. **Mrs. Toe** (Burkina Faso) said that her delegation wished to align itself fully with the statement made by the Group of 77 and China. Burkina Faso was one of the world's poorest countries, with nearly half the population living below the poverty line. Women in Burkina Faso were at the centre of the development debate and played a significant role in the economic, education and agricultural sectors.

95. As part of its efforts to improve living conditions, the Government was seeking to improve access for women and families to credit facilities, to implement legislation guaranteeing women's right to land, to mobilize resources for women's income-generation activities and to improve women's access to technologies for alleviating the burden of domestic chores. Numerous national programmes were also being implemented to further women's human rights, *inter alia* in the development, agricultural and socio-economic fields. The Government's aim was to promote the empowerment of women through improved opportunities and access to economic resources, education and remunerated employment.

96. Burkina Faso remained convinced that a country's development was inextricably linked to the improvement of the status of women. Her Government was committed to fighting poverty, *inter alia* by promoting the education and health of girls, enhancing their participation in the management of natural resources, improving their living conditions, combating violence against women, increasing their participation in decision-making and improving synergy among the relevant mechanisms for advancing the status of women.

97. She expressed her delegation's firm support for the recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit in its evaluation of INSTRAW (A/54/156-E/1999/102 and A/54/156/Add.1-E/1999/102/Add.1).

98. **Ms. Laski** (United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)) recalled that Governments had committed themselves to reaffirming the right of women and girls to physical and mental health. Regrettably, insufficient headway had been made in many areas critical to the Beijing Platform for Action. Women and girls continued to suffer the consequences of gender-based violence and discrimination, of harmful traditional practices and of poverty, especially in rural areas. In commemorating the "Day of the Six Billion", it was important to recall the human beings behind the figures. Despite greater wealth than the world had ever seen, one billion people — the greater proportion of whom were women — continued to lack adequate food, secure housing, basic education and health care.

99. According to the latest figures, as many as 350 million women still lacked access to safe methods of family planning, more than half a million women in developing countries died each year in pregnancy and 70,000 lives were lost each year to unsafe abortions. Women constituted nearly two thirds of the world's 960 million illiterate adults and three fifths of the world's poor. They were also especially vulnerable to HIV/AIDS infection. Moreover, half of all new infections involved young people under the age of 25. As many as 50 per cent of all women were subject to gender-based violence, which was endemic to all countries.

100. UNFPA was unrelenting in its efforts to further the health of women and girls through community-based initiatives, *inter alia* in the area of reproductive health and sex education for girls. Whether they lived in rural or urban

areas, or in the midst of conflicts, women must be given access to the necessary information and services. UNFPA also provided legal and other services for abused women and supported HIV/AIDS prevention in over 130 countries. A number of countries, notably Kenya and Uganda, were taking bold steps towards eradicating harmful traditional practices, with the technical support of UNFPA. Indeed, by forming partnerships, listening to local communities and promoting local participation in decisions relating to development activities, much could be accomplished. The Beijing Platform for Action remained a blueprint for implementing strategies to advance the situation of women everywhere.

The meeting rose at 6.15 p.m.